

MEETING SUMMARY

Project: Seward & 36th Improvements

Location: Loussac Library, Wilda Marston Theater, Anchorage, AK

Project #: 190644

Date and Time: October 2, 2013; 5:30-7:30PM, Presentation 6:00PM

Subject: Public Open House

Staff Attendees:

Sean Holland (DOT&PF)

Julie Jessen (HDR)

Bart Rudolph (DOT&PF)

Jessica Abbott (HDR)

Paul Witt (HDR)

Jessica Conquest (HDR)

Leslie Robbins (HDR)

Meeting Overview

On Wednesday, October 2, 2013, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities hosted a Public Open House for the Seward and 36th Improvements project. The purpose of the meeting was to update the public on the status of the project, to describe work on alternatives development, to explain methods used to identify and compare alternatives (decision matrix), and to seek community input. A total of 14 boards were set up on display for the public to view in the foyer outside of the Wilda Marston Theater beginning at 5:30PM. There was also a video simulation being projected on a screen that showing the traffic of the Seward & 36th Avenue intersection if no action was taken to make improvements.

Following the open house portion of the meeting, a PowerPoint presentation began at 6:00PM in the theater. The presentation was followed by questions and comments from the public, facilitated by Julie Jessen. Responses were provided to all questions that could be answered by Sean Holland and Paul Witt. The meeting ended at approximately 7:30PM.

Advertising

- Postcards to homes and residences within the project area
- Anchorage Daily News – Display Ad, 9/22/13, 9/29/13
- Anchorage Daily News – Online Ad, 9/25/13–10/2/13
- “What’s Up” community email list, 9/19/13, 9/25/13
- Project website
- E-Newsletter sent to project listserv
- Radio Ads with AK Public Media, 9/25/13–10/2/13
- Alaska Online Public Notices
- Community flyers posted at New Sagaya’s Market (3700 Old Seward Hwy), Natural Pantry, CH2MHill coffee shop, Moose’s Tooth, BP Building cafeteria, Fred Meyers (Northern Lights & Benson), Sears Mall
- Certified Receipt Letters sent to Business Owners

Attendance

67 people signed in for the event. There were approximately 15 additional attendees who did not choose to sign in.

Meeting Materials

- Handouts

- Comment Form
- Fact Sheet with Project Area

Meeting Summary

Introductions

Julie Jessen, HDR public involvement specialist, opened the meeting by thanking those in attendance for taking the time to come. She explained that this was the first public open house meeting for the Seward and 36th Improvements Project. Julie then briefly introduced those from the project team who were in attendance before handing the stage over to the project managers.

Meeting Presentation

Sean Holland, DOT&PF project manager, and Paul Witt, HDR project manager, provided a PowerPoint presentation that:

- Provided the background of the project
- Discussed the project's purpose & need and project goals
- Explained the methods used for alternative development and evaluation
- Described the project's next steps

The presentation lasted until approximately 6:45PM.

Presentation Q&A

Note: Questions and comments from the business property owners and the planning team in this summary are a synopsis of the meeting's dialogue. When appropriate, planning team responses have been supplemented to supply complete responses.

Question from Public: So, based on what you have just told us, there is no room for off ramps?

Project team response: The only location where ramps can be designed given the physical constraints of the intersection is inside the highway with left-handed exits/entrances.

Follow-up Comment from Public: It seems as though every exit from Seward Highway is different and there is no consistency.

Question from Public: Has there been thought of digging down?

Project team response: This idea was researched extensively. As a stand alone project, we would be below ground water level. The engineering and materials necessary for this type of construction would be extremely expensive. There would be a lot of long-term maintenance necessary and therefore the project team has focused on designs that take the Seward Highway overtop of 36th Avenue. Taking Seward Highway over also presents less overall disturbances to the surrounding area.

Question from Public: Raising Seward Highway will inevitably make the highway louder. Has the project team considered using quiet asphalt?

Project team response: This is a possibility. In the past we have used rubber pavement and it has worked quite well.

Follow-up Comment from the Public: I have been told it would only cost an additional 4%. That might be the same amount of money as the cost of the sound barrier that would be necessary.

Project team response: Good point. The project team will consider this suggestion.

Question from Public: Can you further describe what portion of each design is elevated? I cannot tell from the images on the screen.

Project team response: Sean and Paul went into further detail describing the layout of each design. Sean said that the project team would work on creating better visual images and make them available on the project website for the public to view.

Question from Public: Do you plan to have frontage roads continue from Tudor and Northern Lights down to this intersection? I don't see them in your designs. If not, you will still have gridlock at Tudor & Old Seward. What does your modeling say?

Project team response: Although there is no perfect solution to this intersection, our modeling does show that traffic will move through the lights at this intersection much quicker with an elevated highway.

Follow-up Comment from Public: Please consider better use of frontage roads from Tudor to Benson.

Comment from Public: Please make this intersection better than the intersection at Dimond Boulevard.

Question from Public: You said that other cities have intersections like these? Where can I find examples of these intersections?

Project team response: The project team will make that information available on the website.

Comment from Public: I work for USFWS. A co-worker of mine used to come into Anchorage for work frequently from rural Alaska and refused to stay at the Best Western Hotel because they had so much trouble crossing the Seward Highway and 36 Avenue intersection.

Question from Public: Will the hSPUI design shorten the time it takes for pedestrians and bicyclists to cross the intersection?

Project team response: Yes, it should reduce the time since 60% of the traffic that is currently at that intersection will be removed.

Question from Public: Is it possible to create a bicycle and pedestrian underpass?

Project team response: Yes, this option is feasible from an engineering standpoint. However, since people do not feel safe in long tunnels, the project team is hesitant.

Question from Public: What about the tunnel that runs under Gamble? A lot of bicyclists use that tunnel on a regular basis. Maybe it is more of a design question?

Project team response: Absolutely. The project team has not written off this idea and various designs will be considered, especially given the abundance of support the idea has amongst the group here this evening.

Comment from Public: The project team should consider burying a culvert. It would be much less expensive to do this if incorporated as part of the project design.

Comment from Public: I agree with the other bicycle comments that have been stated. I think a year-round accessible bike and pedestrian thoroughway is important. It is important to consider the ice build-up that many thoroughways experience during the breakup.

Question from Public: This is not a six month project. If there are no frontage roads incorporated in the design, where will we drive during construction?

Project team response: You are correct. This is more likely to be a two year project and the intersection will be torn up. As a result, it will need to be a phased project that is designed to move traffic around the intersection piece by piece.

Comment from Public: As a motorist, I would love for bicyclists and pedestrians to go underneath the highway. Separate use access would be great.

Question from Public: Why build a CFI if it will be outdated in 10 years?

Project team response: Good question. A CFI could be finished in one season so it would not take nearly as long to build. It is also the only affordable option at this time and would work quite well.

Question from Public: So a CFI isn't truly a continuous flow intersection?

Project team response: Correct, but it is designed to reduce the left hand arrow phase.

Follow-up Comment from Public: But it is clearly worse for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Question from Public: Regarding the hDDI, how would pedestrians cross this intersection?

Project team response: We will clarify this movement on the website.

Question from Public: Has the project team considered removing pedestrian and bicycle crossing from this intersection altogether? Put their crossways elsewhere?

Project team response: There would need to be significant barriers to avoid people from crossing the intersection, but it is definitely possible. We will look further into this option.

Question from Public: What happens to business access?

Project team response: Access will be different for each intersection within each design alternative. The project team is not at the point where we have made those decisions yet. We do not want to kill access. And if possible, we would like to improve access to businesses.

Comment from Public: I own the hotel at the corner of the intersection (Golden Lion) and have a couple of concerns. First, I know DOT&PF has interest in taking a portion their ROW that we currently use for parking. I would like for the project team to consider compressing the green area (shown on the map) instead to save that space. My other concern deals with the left turn access out the back of my property. We are also worried about the increase in noise at the intersection.

Question from Public: What if you raise 36th Avenue over Seward Highway?

Project team response: It is an option, but this design would still require all ramps. This option was part of our first decision matrix. Taking 36th Avenue over the Seward Highway has its own complications. Mainly, it would cut off access to the hotel and the next intersection. It would have a big effect on businesses in the area.

Comment from Public: Do not underestimate the concerns of the pedestrian and bicycle community regarding this project. The bike population in Anchorage is growing.

Comment from Public: I own the Habitat House at University Mall. I do not hear much in your designs that would improve the left turn onto Old Seward when heading west on 36th Avenue. That intersection can be a bottle neck right now. You need to be sure to address the issue at this intersection as well.

Project team response: Preserving all those movements will be hard, but we are looking into options.

Follow-up Comment from Public: You should consider adding lanes to 36th Avenue and have two lanes turning left and two lanes going straight to empty that intersection.

Question from Public: How does this project tie into the Highway to Highway (H2H) project?

Project team response: This project is more focused on the main intersection of Seward Highway and 36th Avenue. We are trying to remain consistent with the current Metro Plan.

Follow-up Question from Public: Is there a final H2H plan published?

Project team response: There is a Long Range Transportation Plan from 20th Avenue heading south.

Follow-up Question from Public: What is the project north of this one that you are trying to fit this project with?

Project team response: We are focusing on 36th Avenue right now, but later will move to Benson and Northern Lights so we need to keep an interchange in mind there as well while we are in the design stages of this project.

Comment from Public: My greatest concern is that the design will kill access to the North Star Center and the restaurant currently accessed from the northern portion of Old Seward. Please consider business access.

Question from Public: Why are you buying property now if the project is only being taken to the 20% design stage?

Project team response: This is being done for advanced access. There are currently three properties under negotiation.

Question from Public: When Seward Highway goes over 36th, is it possible to build four lanes and only use two for now to allow room to expand in the future when necessary?

Project team response: This is a good thought. The project team will take this into consideration.

The question and answer session ended around 7:15PM. The project team stayed for further discussion with the public until 7:30PM.

Public Comment

A number of comment forms were left in the comment box at the end of the meeting. Comments will be recorded and reviewed by the project planning team for consideration.